

Western MRS Meeting Notes
March 27, 2008
AB Tech, Asheville

Counties Present: Catawba, Clay, Cleveland, Iredell, McDowell, Transylvania, Watauga

Introductions

Announcements

Changes in the CFSR

Follow up on FA findings or Contributory Factors

CDSA Referrals

Who to refer

Screening tool

Announcements

- Structured Documentation – Presented to Children's Services - received overwhelming support. Was approved at Children's Services committee, then passed up to executive board, where it was approved as well. The instrument will begin statewide July 1st. Currently has only been developed for assessments, has not gone into Foster Care and adoptions yet but hope to expand that quickly. Hope to get template on the web by April 1st so that counties who need to develop IT around it or manage incorporating it into existing documentation structure will have adequate time to do so. It will be mandatory to use this format. Akin to structured intake – the format is required, a template is provided if counties wished to use it, but if you want to use a different format in your county you may as long as you include all the information that is in the template.
Will probably put this on the agenda for the May meeting so we can discuss it before it becomes mandatory.
- Foster Care documentation tool was also approved. (This was discussed more completely last month – notes on that discussion and a template of the tool is included in February's meeting notes.)
- Confidential Intermediary policy was also passed. There are currently 3 confidential intermediary consultants at the Division.
- Court Involvement - Revising Chapter 8 to make this piece its own section to cover 210, 215 and 109. Will also be doing the same with Child and Family teams.
- CFT training is now required for all workers. Facilitator training required if you facilitate cases. (see February's notes for more information on this as well).
- CFT Policy – will now be a whole chapter. Used to be just a page in 1412, now a 23-24 page chapter.
- National Differential Conference will be in Charlotte in November 2009. Last year this conference included about 29 states and several other countries.
- Duke – wrapping up 2 years of data collections – phone interviews, surveys. What is on tap for next year is compiling and analyzing data and producing a report. Also all 100 counties will get a fact sheet, which last year only the Pilot 10 received. Currently

designing the template for the fact sheet. At this point it is not too late to offer suggestions as to things you would like to see on these sheets. Will also be doing CFT observations next year. There is a tool that they will be using (which cannot be distributed yet) and then Nicole will be sharing more information about this tool and the CFT evaluation.

Changes in the CFSR

Part of the ongoing reform effort is a revision of our CFSR. Ongoing, continuous improvement will serve to make every agency stronger. In that vein, with the help of some counties the Division revised our CFSR protocol. One of the things we are trying to do is move away from the idea that this is just a score that you get on a review, and move to the idea that this is a way that you can improve services in your community.

Charles from the review team presented on the new CFSR tool.

There is an entire training presentation that the Review team gives around the state. Will be upcoming training in Cartaret and Guilford. Now county staff are required to take the training before their review.

- NC had a Federal Review in March 2007.
- NC Passed one Outcome – Education.
- Passed 5 of 7 Systemic Factors – failed Court and Services Array.
- As a result of that, we changed our process so that we looked more like the Federal process.
- The state review team looked at things differently than the federal reviews. Decided that we wanted to get training from the federal reviewers. Some of the review team went to Atlanta to get training from them. Took two cases and got training from the Feds to see if they could teach us to review in the way they do.
- Got some clarification, and will change the process as well as the way that we rate things.
- The problem was that the results of the NC review differed greatly from the Fed's review. Seems NC was not being strict enough. NC has a debriefing session and if we rated something as an area of needing improvement, and counties felt it was a strength and could make a good enough case, NC tended to give counties the benefit of the doubt. This resulted in a lot of changes because the Feds were stricter.
- NC will now have an internal review process.
- There will be less room for debate/negotiation at the debriefing. There is still the option of calling Raleigh to settle a disagreement, but so far this has not happened. The trainings are very comprehensive and counties know what to expect when the review team comes.
- No one has passed all outcomes as of yet.
 - Most counties are only passing a couple of outcomes. Don't freak out if you have been passing most of them and think that your quality of work is deteriorating. Failures are due to the change in the review.
- CPRs will not review cases but they will be on site. This is a change, their main role will now be to observe the process and assist with coordination and be available to begin working with counties on a program improvement plan if necessary.

- NC will now have an internal review process.
 - New process where 7 pilot counties will have an internal review. Buncombe, Cartaret, Catawba, Lincoln, Onslow, Orange are some of the other pilot counties.
 - If the pilot of the Internal Review goes well, it may go statewide.
 - Other counties will have regularly scheduled CFSRs. The pilot counties will have theirs at the end of the cycle we just began.
- Has been some question if conflict cases will be included. At this time yes, but there has been some discussion about changing this.
- Jurisdictional Cases (Cross-County)
 - Change to how we are doing jurisdictional cases. All service areas will be considered in jurisdictional cases. Counties will request the records from the other county and have them available for the on-site review. The only people who will be interviewed are the social worker and the supervisor. The Division will tell the other county what their findings are before they leave. They will rate each county on the part they played in the case.
 - When review occurs, if counties have a jurisdictional case being reviewed, if they are found to need improvement, there may be a program improvement plan for both counties.
 - Before they leave the county they are reviewing, both counties will know that the case has been reviewed and how the case was rated.
- Where are cases pulled from?
 - Review team will request a list of jurisdictional cases and send it to the county being reviewed. This will require the counties to develop a log or some means of tracking jurisdictional cases and identify the counties that they worked with.
 - Cases open for 60 days within the review period (with the exception of assessments because they are not open for 60 days but will be included).
- CFTs
 - Will be looking more closely to ensure that CFTs are occurring. (Item 18 the case planning question in the tool.) Ensuring that case plans are developed with families, were parents involved (and children where appropriate). How often did meetings occur?
 - Have found that CFTs are called different things throughout the state. The review team will look at the meeting to ensure that if it was called a CFT is truly was a CFT and not just a meeting. Must be able to see that the family was involved, their supports were there, some evidence that you made an effort to include the supports for the family, and that there was effort made to accommodate the family's schedule. In the past there was not as much of an emphasis on this, but there will now be a large focus on CFTs.
- Diligent Efforts – no longer a factor
 - Reports must be initiated timely by counties. This was always true, but we took diligent effort into account. We will not take diligent effort into account, the case must be initiated (only exception is if Law Enforcement is involved and they request that we not initiate immediately).

- Question - If you are in program improvement because you didn't initiate timely because the family went to the beach or something, how would you fix that?
 - Some discussion at the state that you wouldn't have to have a program improvement plan if this was the only thing that you were rated 'needs improvement' on because we realize that there would be nothing you could do in a situation like this. This would only apply if you have the diligent efforts documented about why you could not initiate.
- Repeat maltreatment - will be looked at differently
 - Will look at the number of reports over the life of the case. If, in the review period, you have a Substantiation or Services Needed finding and within 6 months before or after you have another one, that is repeat maltreatment - period. In the past if it was a different perpetrator or different allegations it was not repeat maltreatment, but now it will be even if it was a totally different situation.
- Adoption & Safe Families Act
 - NC law says you must have an exception or file a TPR petition within 12 months. Federal law says 15 months. Now we will be rating on the 12 months. Want to be sure that you file the TPR petition within 12 months and the petition is in the records. If you are not going to file the exception needs to be included in the court order.
- Court ordered concurrent plan
 - Work has to be done for both the permanent plan and the concurrent plan. The review team will rate both plans, whereas previously only rated one.
- APPLA (Another Permanent Planned Living Arrangement)
 - For teenagers where it is difficult to identify a plan. No realistic options out there for a child who is 16 and will probably age out. The Feds were concerned that we did not have long term foster care as a plan. The feedback was that we needed a plan like this. NC working on developing a plan for these children.
 - There is an internal workgroup working on developing this. After it is developed internally it will be passed to the folks on the court workgroup.
- ICWA
 - Preserving connections. Indian Child welfare Act requires that for placement cases an inquiry has to be made into the child's Native American heritage. We did not do well on that, so we are focusing on this area. Want to ensure that social workers have made inquiries into the child's potential Native American heritage. Looking for documentation that an inquiry has been made into this heritage and not just checked "no" on the form.
 - Question – The understanding is that the act only applies to nationally recognized tribes. What about those that are not nationally recognized? Also counties need guidance on what they are supposed to do if someone says "yes" but no one has any idea how to trace several generations ago with no names or anything. NC Law says that even for non-federally recognized tribes, we must include the tribe in the child welfare processes.

- Contacting Relatives
 - These children are our clients – they deserve to have all members of the their family. Remember that when you are trying to decide the specifics of what to do in a particular case situation. This includes absent parents as well as extended family.
 - Maternal and paternal relatives must be considered. The real concern has been lack of contact with fathers living outside the home. However this applies to both parents and their relatives. The agency must make an effort to determine the identity of the father if mother is not forthcoming.
 - Efforts to involve both parents must be made and must be ongoing. Lack of efforts to involve fathers affect ratings of *multiple items* on the tool. If work with either of these parents did not occur and there is not documentation to document regular and ongoing attempts to contact and encourage involvement, several items will be rated as needed improvement. Used to only take off on one item about this, but now will affect multiple items. This applies for assessment, in-home cases, and foster care cases. They will take into account where the parent resides when determining if there was sufficient involvement (out of state will not be held to the same standard as someone who lives across town.) However there must be some involvement no matter what - even if someone is in prison for 50 years out of state there needs to be phone calls or letters.
 - Question – If family has no idea where the missing relative is, and you have run a NCFast check, and DOC check, and checked the court records, and cannot find any sign of him, will that suffice?
 - Can't say for 100% sure. Will be a case by case decision on how exhaustive how it needs to be. Use all tools as your disposal. Such as US Search.com, Google, need to show that you have continuously searched throughout the life of the case. Didn't just search NCFast etc. the first day and then never search again. Talk to collaterals and see if that have any information, and every time you interact with a new person see if they have any information.
 - Question - If the case is ready to be closed for assessment and the father has never been involved, and the case will be unsubstantiated, how much time to you hold the case open while you are looking for dad who has never been a part of the life – this becomes intrusive to the family.
 - Don't hold the case open just to find Dad in an assessment case. Just document that you were making efforts, but if there is no way to find him by the time you close the case and the case is not mandatory services go ahead and close the case and document your diligent effort to find Dad.
 - Question – Confidentiality – how much can we share with non-custodial parent if the reason we are involved is the custodial parents substance abuse (for example) – how much can we say about another person's issues.

- Can't say the specifics like "she didn't pass her drug screen" but we can say "there continue to be safety issues". If non-custodial parent wants more specifics they should become more involved with the case they should participate in CFTs. If the non-custodial parent just wants dirt on the other parent, we don't want to play into that.
 - Safety Issues – have to determine if there is a real safety issue for the Mom and family investigate that – don't just not contact Dad because she says "he is mean" or something. If there is a true DV issue there should probably be some documented history of the past, police reports, etc.
 - Incarcerated (esp. long term) – cannot ignore these parents. At least letters or something. May need to do more depending on the issues leading to the incarceration and how much longer they will be incarcerated.
 - If possible, do a face to face interview with the incarcerated person. If the facility is in another county, see if you can get an assist from the county where the facility is located.
- Face to face visits.
 - These visits with children and parents must be made by a DSS social worker, those made by a contractual agency will not be counted – exception is Vanguard or other agencies that provide actual social worker staff. Those staff will be considered employees of the agencies. If you contract with Vanguard to fill a position, those visits will count. If the only reason you contract with them is to do visits, and the case manager is still a permanent employee with the agency then these visits won't count. *In order for their visits to count, the Vanguard employee must hold case management responsibility for that child* – but you can contract with Vanguard to be the case manager for a child instead of just to do the visits. (No longer ok for them to have the contracting agency to make visits monthly and the agency social worker just see the child quarterly.)
 - The visits can be done by a DSS worker in the county where the child was placed. For example, if you are Clay county and you have a child placed in New Hanover, you don't have to go to New Hanover, a permanent employee of New Hanover DSS can do the visit for you, (just like as assist). You just can't contract with Vanguard just to do visits.
 - Waiting on clarification for ICPC – but we are not looking at a requirement that you actually send a worker to another state to make a visit, just that you know where the children are and that they are safe. Not planning to count against you if you don't go the other state.
- Including all children in case planning
 - All children who are cognitively and emotionally able must be involved in case planning. Not necessarily specifically a signature on the case plan, but clear evidence of involvement in the process and the meetings. Signatures are good, but not as the only evidence of involvement. Previously it was children 12 and over, now this has been expanded.

- Being reviewed not as a DSS, but as a county
 - For example if there are no Mental Health services in your county, that will be noted as a problem on the review. The Court system, Mental Health, etc will be a part of the review because these services are needed. If they are not available, NC reviewers used to take that into consideration, but not anymore. You may get counted off. However, they will make a note of why it was counted off, but they will still count off. As the federal government looks at it, all these services are part of the state.
 - The way the State dealt with that on our PIP was to not have all the items for improvement be the responsibility of DSS. We sent the Federal report over to MH (and other agencies) with areas highlighted and asked them how we could partner with them to address these issues. All we can do is try to partner with them and document that we have tried to partner with other agencies to address issues that we (DSS) cannot control but affect the work that we do.

End note on the level of individual services we have discussed.

- These children are our clients, and no matter how overworked we as social workers are, we have to provide the best possible services to these children. Many times the state cannot give you a cut and dried answer on how much diligent effort you need to provide on a case without knowing the specifics. If it was your child that was not getting what they needed in school, or you were not getting what you needed from your Doctor, how would you feel if the teacher or physician said they gave you less than adequate service because they were overworked? You would not accept that, why would we expect that the children we are working with should accept it? We can't be perfect, but we have to do the best that we can, and this may involve going to your county and asking for financial resources – the state cannot provide everything. You don't need to run DNA testing on every case, or use US Search on all assessments. Don't go to ridiculous lengths, but do the best that you can for every case.

Any follow up on FA or Contributory Factors?

Talked about this last month (see last month's notes for more information). The dividing line is: if the assessment would have gone to 215 but you put services in place that sufficiently lowered the risk, then the finding should be: Services Provided, CPS Services no longer needed. If it never would have gone to 215 at all, then it is Services Recommended.

- You can still make a finding of Services Recommended if there were services that were provided – Services Recommended does not mean that there were no services provided, instead it refers to the type of services and the relation of those services to the risk level. If the case never would have gone to 215 in the first place, and there were some services provided, the finding is not Services Provided, it is Services Recommended. Remember the entire name of the Services Provided finding, Services Provided, CPS Services no Longer Needed. No longer needed means that CPS services would have been needed had you not provided these services.

- Changing tracks – what are the criteria?
 - Policy changes (ex: took as family assessment, but go out and it is clearly abuse).
 - Otherwise you have to relate it back to the safety of the child. Switching tracks will make it safer for the child because, why??
 - Cannot make the change at the time of case decision – can only make it while there are still activities during the assessment.
 - If it comes to case decision and the supervisor feels that it needs to be switched, you can't make the case decision that day, you will need to go back out and talk to the family. If this happens a lot with certain workers, this is a training issue to work with that particular worker.

Contributory Factors

Talked about these last month. People said that some of these just don't fit. We can add things to this form, but we will need to leave the current ones in as well, because those are the ones the feds track. The biggest issue is that many contributory factors require some sort of diagnosis which makes it difficult to get within a 45 day time frame for the assessment.

Some type of cases (sex abuse) have no appropriate contributory factors.

How would you like to capture sexual abuse?

- Could put it under the child and call it “victim of sexual abuse” – because sometimes it is not the caretaker who did it, so don't put it under the caretaker.
- Would like to see something under the caretaker category that they were a victim of sexual abuse themselves.

CDSA referrals

- Dear county director letter came out discussing these changes. Section 1408 page 23 and Section 1412 page 7 have the policy.
- Policy used to be to refer every child under the age of 3 who was substantiated.
- Early Intervention, Public Health, along with a Work Group met to discuss the referral process. Concerned that referrals were being generated that were inappropriate or there were no early intervention needs identified, and this was creating increased work for Early Intervention staff. Spent a lot of time tracking to track down families who either didn't need services or would refuse to accept services.
- Decision was made to ask Child Welfare workers to do a partial screening for CDSA – would not be doing the actual screening that Early Intervention staff would do, would do a pre-screening process. In the family strengths needs assessment if you have any identification of a need for item S6 (child characteristics) you can make a referral to CDSA if the finding is substantiated or services needed, or if in your professional opinion this child could benefit from CDSA services. Not removing all of the discretion, but giving guidance (can still refer if S6 is not identified as a need).
- If S6 is a need and there is a finding of Substantiation or Services Needed you have to refer. If S6 is not a need, can still refer.
- Eligibility conditions and more information located at: www.ncei.org

Other Discussion

- Documentation format has a page for diligent effort documentation. If they put that information there, do they need to add it to dictation so that it is chronological?
 - No, if you put it in the documentation with the date and time there don't have to duplicate and put it into the dictation as well.
- Recommend that we add parents signature lines on risk assessment and strengths and needs. Also blocks for children to sign or indicate some participation.

Possible Topics for Future Meetings

- May – documentation
- Foster Care Licensing Issues – new licensing regulations, how kinship care and adoption is different.
- Foster Care Policy – shared parenting, combining PPATs with CFTs
- Structured Decision Making tools - The Division has contracted with Children's Research Center to come to NC and evaluate the structured decision making tools. We will be sending the tools as they are to the Children's Research Center to have them run some validation tests. (We borrowed these tools from Minnesota – where they were validated for their population, which is not demographically similar enough to ours to ensure that the tools are valid for NC.)
- Moral turpitude reports – do counties send those to law enforcement and DA? – did not seem to be an issue here.
- The connection between Juvenile Court and our cases. Dual jurisdiction cases.
- Referring to the growing Latino community – Latinos typically have communities where everyone is responsible for the children, and so some families think that the whole community is watching their kids, when they move here. They don't realize that its neglect to let your 3 year old kids run outside in the trailer park while you are inside is neglect here and often the park managers are calling and reporting. The problem is easily rectified once they go out and educate, so wondering if we could figure out some way to educate newly arrived Latino families about things that you can't do in America.
- Have someone from the Latino community come to the meeting so we can learn from each other why some things happen.

April meetings:

Central: Guilford Co DSS – April 22nd

Western: Asheville, AB Tech - April 14th

East: Edgecombe DSS Tarboro Office – April 15th